

Ser and Estar – Transcript

Context

Hola y buenos días. “To be or not to be?” Well, that certainly was and is the question, especially when it comes to Spanish. As you know, we have two verbs that are used to express “to be” – *ser* and *estar*. The good news is that, by now, you already know the basic present tense forms of these verbs. So today, we’re going to focus this lesson on the differences between those two verbs and on when you should use each.

Let’s get started.

Information

1. First, let’s talk about the general uses *ser* and *estar*, when we are using them without adjectives.
 - a. *Estar* – We use *estar* to express location and condition. If I want to say where someone or something is, I use *estar*. *El libro está en la mesa.* When people ask you how you are (i.e. how you are feeling), you use *estar* because that’s the verb that communicates physical and emotional condition. *Estoy bien* or *Estoy cansado*.
 - b. *Ser* – There are five general uses for *ser*.
 - i. Identity (occupation, nationality, political affiliation) – *Mi hermano es católico.*
 - ii. Origin – *Soy de México.*
 - iii. Possession – *El libro es de María.*
 - iv. Time (what time it is or when something takes place) – *La clase es a las ocho.*
 - v. What something is made of – *El reloj es de plástico.*
2. Now, let’s talk about the two verbs as used with adjectives.
 - a. *Ser* – We use *ser* with adjectives to express natural or inherent qualities. *Las flores son bonitas; La estudiante es inteligente; La casa es amarilla;* these are all descriptions of Basic, natural qualities of the things being described.
 - b. *Estar* – When we use *estar* with adjectives, we’re expressing a current state of being or feeling. *Estoy alegre* means I’m happy, as in I’m happy

right now. *Estar* is also used to express an unnatural or “caused” condition. Instead of saying *La casa es amarilla* to say that it is painted yellow (i.e. its natural condition), I might say *La casa está amarilla por el sol* (it’s been yellowed by exposure to the sun). The unnatural condition is also why we say *El aire está contaminado* or *El agua está contaminada*. We don’t consider the state of contamination to be natural either for air or water.

3. Okay, let’s take a brief quiz. I’ll say a sentence in English and you tell me whether or not to use *ser* or *estar*.
 - a. I did poorly on the test and I’m really angry. (*estar*)
 - b. The teacher is a nice person. (*ser*)
 - c. The teacher is tall. (*ser*)
 - d. I ate too much and feel (am) really fat. (*estar*)

Review – Things to Remember

Those weren’t too bad, were they? The basic thing to remember is that *estar* is used consistently to express location and condition. In the case of adjectives, we use it for conditional or unnatural qualities or feelings. *Ser* is used with adjectives to express natural or inherent qualities. It’s also used to express identity, origin, possession, time, and what something is made of.